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CLYTIE

A LYRICAL PLAY FOR CHILDREN^{*}

MARY ETHEL COURTENAY

Dramatis Personae

<i>Clytie</i>	A Water Nymph
<i>Leucothia</i>	Her Sister
<i>Crystalia</i>	Leader of the Nymphs
<i>The Nymphs</i>	Daughters of Oceanus

SCENE I

SCENE: *Field on the bank of a river. A group of water nymphs in soft clinging robes, their long hair entwined with garlands of seaweed, are seen dancing in a circle on the banks of the stream and singing.*

TIME: *Just before dawn.*

Song of the River Nymphs:

Soft through the tree-tops the night breeze now
 passes,
 Murmuring low as it ripples the grasses;
 Lightly our footsteps now press the cool lawn;
 Gaily we frolic till coming of dawn,
 Ere mortals arousing their couches forsake,
 Ere the whole earth is astir and awake:
 Then quick through the reeds and the rushes we
 glide;
 Under the waves of the river we hide:
 For man must not see the nymph child of the
 stream,
 Nor sun-god disclose with a radiant beam.

Crystalia (pausing in the dance and pointing toward the East):

O see, my sisters, even now a glow,
 All warm and rosy, fringes yonder hills,
 And sheds a halo over their grey tops.
 The Sun-god, Helios, climbs the distant steep
 To trace his daily course across the sky.

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Clytie (musingly):

The radiant sun-god of the golden car.

Second Nymph: We must away, away before he comes.

Nymphs (in unison):

Yes, yes, away!

Clytie: I would that we might stay.

Leucothia: To see the gleaming chariot all of gold
And prancing steeds that from their nostrils
breathe

A spray of sparks and tongues of darting flame.

Clytie: To see the sun-god, him who drives the car
Each day across the pathway of the sky,
More glorious than a hundred deities
That rule the silvery pallor of the night.

Crystallia: Sisters, make haste, or else we disobey
The law that Father Oceanus spoke.

The morning dawns, the light is come, away!

*(The Nymphs join hands and dance away after their leader, singing,
except Clytie and Leucothia, who stand looking
intently toward the East.)*

Leucothia (suddenly starting and glancing round):

How still it is! O Clytie, they have gone,
And we have disobeyed, have broke the law
That bids us all return when comes another day.

Clytie: What harm to linger for a sight so rare?
Our father is unjust in his command,
That he denies us sight of one most fair
Of all the gods that on Olympus dwell.
I will remain till I have seen him mount
The pinnacles of Heav'n and all the earth
Grow warm and bright and glad because of him.

Leucothia: Then I will stay to see fair Helios, too;
Together we will watch?—And yet—I fear—

Clytie: See, even now he climbs above the hills;
Dull greyness flees in shame before his glow,
And night's proud queen and all her starry hosts
Have paled and vanished at the god's approach.

- Leucothia:* To see and feel his presence from afar
Is worth the risking of our father's wrath.
They say the warm rays of his shining car,
Together with the glory of his smile,
Coax from the ground the tender shoots of spring,
And cause the buds to burst for very joy
And flowers to raise their heads to smile at him.
- Clytie:* What flower would not live content to know
That he but looked upon her as he passed,
That he, the beaming god of life and love
Had thought to cast a single ray to earth
To touch her heart and kindle it with joy.
- Leucothia:* Children of men arise to greet him, too:
Do you not hear a faint awak'ning stir
That says the long night of repose is o'er?
How bright and ever brighter grows the day!
O, sister, think you not we should return?
- Clytie:* Leucothia, you fear, you dare not risk
The anger of our father. Then return.
Remain with those content to stay and hear,
And leave to mortal men and deities
The pleasure and the worship that they crave.
But I go on to yonder grassy knoll
That rises from the green with gentle slope.
There will I gather flowers, and ferns, and leaves
To twine about my hair and wreath my form:
There will I wait with arms outstretched to him
And stand beneath the radiance of his glance
As he drives by along the path of heav'n.
And he will smile upon me when he sees
That I will honor him in spite of all,
And love him, caring not what may befall.
- Leucothia* (following Clytie as she moves on):
Nay, sister, I will go and stand with you,
And Helios will smile upon me too!

(End of Scene 1)

SCENE II

TIME: *Same hour as before, on the following day.*

SCENE: *Another part of the river's brink. A group of nymphs is seen seated on the ground about their leader, who sits disconsolate on a low mound in their midst. Some are weaving garlands and others, singing and dancing, move in and out among the trees.*

Second Nymph (placing a wreath of leaves on the head of *Crystalia*):
A crown of myrtle freshly kissed with dew.

Third Nymph (throwing a garland over her shoulders):
Garlands that Pan himself might choose to wear.

Fourth Nymph (laying a cluster of flowers in her lap):
Surely Diana could not be more fair.

Second Nymph: But see, she neither notices our gifts
Nor has she heeded aught that we have said.

Third Nymph: 'Tis marvel that she came with us at all
To join our nightly revel on the green.

Crystalia (rising and lifting the garlands that have been given her):
Sisters, I have not heart to dance and sing
Nor can I join in lightsome revelry.
This very garland presses on my brow;
And I can think of nothing but the wrath
Of Oceanus, and the stern command
That keeps Leucothia, our gentle one,
Apart from all our frolic, from our midst.

Third Nymph: She has been guilty of a grave offense,
For she has disobeyed the father's law.

Nymphs (in chorus):
When rosy-tinted skies proclaim the morn,
When upon earth another day is born,
Then in the sylvan glade or on the green
No child of Oceanus may be seen.

Fourth Nymph: But did not Clytie also disobey?

Second Nymph: I doubt not Clytie first proposed to stay;
For often I have heard her wish that we
Might tarry here until the sun-god came.
And once she even thought of venturing
To plead with Oceanus for this boon.

Fifth Nymph (stepping forward from the background):

It was from Clytie that our father learned
The disobedience of Leucothia.

Crystalia: From Clytie?

Third Nymph: Tell us how it came about.

Nymphs (together):

Tell us, tell us, sister, what you know.

Fifth Nymph: The day was far advanced when they returned,
But Father Oceanus, as you know,
Had noticed not their absence. I made haste,
For I, alone, had heard them as they came,
Leaving the shells I had been polishing,
To greet them with the word that I spoke well.
But scarcely had I spoken when I saw
That there had been harsh words between the two.
A flush of anger colored Clytie's cheek,
Leucothia's eyes were red and stained with tears;
And neither looked at me but hurried on.
Then suddenly there came a threatening sound
That rumbled through the caverns of the stream,
That made the waters surge and foaming rise
To toss in waves and beat against the banks:
It was the river god to wrath provoked
Who struck the sandy floor with his long staff
And thundered his command in angry tones.
Gentle Leucothia trembled at each word,
And when she fain would offer an appeal
Or speak in her defense, he silenced her.

"Your disobedience do not deny,
Your sister Clytie saw and told me of it."

Nymphs: O cruel Clytie!

Crystalia: How could she have done't?

And now she wanders lonely and apart
With no companion save her own remorse.

(*Clytie is seen wandering along the bank of the river in the background.*)

Second Nymph (pointing to the East):

Sisters, beware, lest we too long delay.

Crystalia: Once more the dawn.

All: Away! we must away!

(As they move toward the stream Clytie draws away from them.)

Crystalia (approaching her):

My sister, come, the morning light is here.

(Clytie draws back in silence.)

Second Nymph (sarcastically):

No nymph is this but rather goddess born,
Who seeks the fellowship and even courts
The graces of the god of light himself.
The law that simple water nymphs obey
Holds no authority for such as she.

Third Nymph: Goddess in aspirations, but in heart
No nymph is so ungodlike as is she.

Fourth Nymph: A proud and cruel heart.

Fifth Nymph: An unkind tongue.

Crystalia: Sisters, away. Come, Clytie, tarry not.
Repeated sin can naught of pity claim.

Clytie (proudly):

I ask no pity, nor do I expect
Aught but rebuke, but scorn and taunts from you.
Delay not; pause to waste no thought on me.
A second time I disobey the law,
To wait for him who gives not scorn but smiles,
Who knows no hate, whose pity is so free
That it is measured by the world itself.

(Crystalia reluctantly follows her sisters, and Clytie turns her gaze toward the rising sun.)

Clytie (with outstretched arms):

O, Helios, to thee alone I turn,
For only thou wilt show me kindness now!
I'll sit forever on this grassy mound
And live content to watch and worship thee.
(Dropping her arms—continues musingly):
I wonder if he knows that I have sinned
If even he will blame though not rebuke,
With inward censure, though no outward scorn.

Why even as I look he seems to draw
 An all-obscuring mist before his face
 To veil his presence and withhold his smile.
 O, Helios, must I believe that thou
 Hast sealed thy pity—thy compassion turned
 Aside from me whom all things else have spurned ?
(Clytie sinks in despair upon the low mound.)

(End of Scene II)

SCENE III

SCENE: *Same as Scene II.*

TIME: *Same as before, three days later.*

(A single sunflower is seen growing on the grassy mound. The nymphs form a silent and wondering group about it.)

Crystallia (regarding the flower):

Still toward the East she turns her constant gaze,
 With loyal worship and enduring love,
 Waiting to follow with the adoring glance
 The sun-god's daily course across the sky.
 She sought not pity, but the gods of heaven,
 Moved with compassion at the sight of her,
 All pale and tearful, pining day by day,
 Catching the radiance of the god himself,
 Touched with his glory, by his pity blessed,
 Have shaped these slender rays of living gold
 That circle with a halo her rich heart.
 And so unto all time and men she stands
 To tell the story of unchanging love.

Leucothia:

"What flower would not live content to know
 That he but looked upon her as he passed,
 That he, the beaming God of life and love,
 Had thought to cast a single ray to earth
 To touch her heart and kindle it with joy."
 Thus Clytie spoke, and mighty Zeus hath willed
 That this, her heart's desire, should be fulfilled.

(The Nymphs join hands and circle about the flower singing.)

Song of the Nymphs:

Fair flower-maid of sunlight born
With face upturned to greet the morn,
From hamp'ring law and wrath set free,
Clytie still lives and loves in thee.